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Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders

Note by the Secretariat

In the present report, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, Michel Forst, conceptualizes good practices in the protection of human rights defenders at the local, national, regional and international levels. He outlines protection initiatives in three interrelated areas: practices that strengthen the resources and capacities of defenders; measures that foster an enabling environment for the defence of their rights; and regional and international initiatives that support their protection at the local and national levels. He concludes the report with seven principles underpinning good practices in the protection of defenders, and makes recommendations on further ways to strengthen, replicate and disseminate them.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is the second thematic report submitted to the Human Rights Council by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, pursuant to Council resolutions 16/5 and 25/18 and General Assembly resolution 66/164.

2. In the report, the Special Rapporteur provides a brief overview of the activities that he has carried out since the previous reporting period (chap. II). He then presents a thematic study on good practices in the protection of human rights defenders by first conceptualizing protection practices, including at the local, national, regional and international levels (chap. III). He subsequently outlines protection initiatives in three interrelated areas: practices that strengthen the resources and capacities of defenders (chap. IV); practices that foster an enabling environment for the defence of their rights (chap. V); and regional and international practices that support the protection of defenders at the local and national levels (chap. VI). The Special Rapporteur concludes the report by proposing seven principles that underpin good practices in the protection of defenders, and makes recommendations on ways to strengthen, disseminate and replicate them.

II. Activities

A. Communications

3. The Special Rapporteur is mandated to intervene directly with Governments on allegations of human rights violations by means of communications. Such intervention may relate to a violation that has already been committed, is ongoing or that has a high risk of occurring. The communications process involves addressing a letter to the State concerned, identifying the facts of the allegation, applicable international human rights norms and standards, the concerns and questions of the Special Rapporteur, and a request for follow-up action.

4. Communications are an essential tool for the work of the mandate, given that they draw attention to urgent cases of defenders that require the immediate attention of States. They allow the Special Rapporteur to raise concerns about individual situations and more general patterns, and can be instrumental in preventing violations against defenders. Defenders see the communications as one of the main forms of international protection at their disposal.

5. Between 1 December 2014 and 30 November 2015, the Special Rapporteur addressed 209 communications to 80 States. He drew attention to the situation of more than 422 persons; 184 of the communications were to follow up on persons or organizations that had previously been the subject of communications. A total of 12 communications related to cases of reprisal against groups or persons as a result of their cooperation with the United Nations, its mechanisms or representatives in the sphere of human rights.

6. Examined by region, 66 communications (31.6 per cent) were addressed to States in the Asia-Pacific region; 38 (18.2 per cent) to States in Latin America and the Caribbean; 35 (16.75 per cent) to States in the Middle East and North Africa; 35 (16.75 per cent) to States in Europe, North America and Central Asia; 34 (16.3 per cent) to States in Africa; and one to a business enterprise (0.4 per cent).

7. The annual report on communications submitted by the Special Rapporteur (A/HRC/31/55/Add.1) provides further detailed analysis, observations and replies from

Governments on communications issued during the period of 1 December 2014 and 30 November 2015.

8. In 2015, the Special Rapporteur continued to speak out publicly to draw the attention of States and the international community to the situation of human rights defenders. He issued more than 40 public statements on the situation of defenders in 30 countries, many with other mandate holders.[1]

B. Country visits

9. Since assuming his mandate in June 2014, the Special Rapporteur has paid an official visit to Burundi in November 2014 (see A/HRC/31/55/Add.2).

10. The Special Rapporteur has outstanding visit requests to 17 States, including several that are long-standing (to Bahrain, Belarus, China, Jamaica, Maldives, the Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Viet Nam).[2] He regrets that several other States (Azerbaijan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) have not yet communicated specific dates for a visit, despite their general commitment to it.

11. The Special Rapporteur alsoregrets that the Governments of Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Peru and the Philippines have failed to confirm, on numerous occasions, their acceptance of specific dates for country visit in 2015 or 2016, despite the many exchanges in that regard. Nonetheless, the Special Rapporteur intends to follow through on his requests in 2016, and hopes that the States concerned will give due attention and respond positively.

12. The Special Rapporteur is aware of the workload that such visits impose on the authorities of the States visited; he therefore wishes to thank the Governments that have issued an invitation or agreed to receive a visit. In that context, he notes with satisfaction the acceptance by the Government of Hungary of his request to visit the country from 8 to 16 February 2016.

C. Cooperation with international, regional and national partners

13. The Special Rapporteur underlines the importance of cooperation with stakeholders on the international, regional and national levels, and therefore provides an overview of activities undertaken since his previous report to the General Assembly (see A/70/217, paras. 15-27), from 1 August to the end of December 2015.

14. From 25 to 28 August 2015, the Special Rapporteur participated in the twentieth annual meeting and the third Biennial Conference of the Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, held in Ulaanbaatar. He also took part in the concurrent Regional Conference of the Asian NGO Network on National Human Rights Institutions (ANNI), organized by FORUM-ASIA in Ulaanbaatar.

15. From 1 to 3 September, the Special Rapporteur was in Caracas to take part in an academic event on human rights defenders, organized by the Andrés Bello Catholic University.

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[1] The public statements made by the Special Rapporteur are available from the media centre of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights at www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents.

[2] More information on country visits by the Special Rapporteur and other mandate-holders is available at: www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/CountryandothervisitsSP.aspx.

16. On 22 and 23 September, the Special Rapporteur addressed the 2015 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Warsaw, also taking part in a side event on human rights defenders organized by the European Union.

17. On 14 and 15 October, a staff member of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supporting the mandate of the Special Rapporteur participated in "Closing civil society space gathering", which was organized in Geneva by CIVICUS and Human Rights Watch and which brought together more than 40 civil society leaders from international and regional civil society organizations.

18. On 20 October, the Special Rapporteur was in Washington, D.C. to meet with representatives of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and of civil society. Two days later, he presented his second report to the General Assembly, on global trends in risks facing human rights defenders (A/70/217).

19. At the eighth Dublin Platform, held from 4 to 6 November, and organized by Frontline Defenders, the Special Rapporteur delivered a keynote speech and met more than 100 defenders from all around the world. He also met on the margins with representatives of the Government of Ireland.

20. On 11 November, in Germany, the Special Rapporteur held meetings in Berlin with the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs to discuss the work of his mandate, challenges and current trends. He also met with representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Federal Human Rights Commissioner.

21. On 1 and 2 December, the Special Rapporteur conducted an unofficial working visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, at the invitation of the All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group. During his visit, he also met with government officials as part of a Wilton Park dialogue on ways to strengthen the protection of human rights defenders in the United Kingdom and around the world. He also participated in a round table with representatives of civil society organizations and in an academic event at the University of London.

22. On 3 and 4 December, the Special Rapporteur took part in the seventeenth European Union-NGO Forum on Human Rights in Brussels, dedicated to protecting and promoting civil society space.

23. On 10 December, an OHCHR staff member supporting the mandate of the Special Rapporteur assisted at and participated in the Hague Training Course 2015, organized by Justice and Peace for defenders at risk, and attended the award ceremony of the Human Rights Tulip 2015, held by the Government of the Netherlands for defenders promoting human rights in innovative ways.

III. Conceptualizing protection practices

A. Background

24. In October 2015, the Special Rapporteur presented his second report to the General Assembly, which outlined main observations and findings from the seven regional consultations he had organized with human rights defenders from October 2014 to June 2015 (A/70/217, paras. 28-98). The consultations brought together more than 500 defenders, including 280 women defenders, from 111 States.

25. As underlined by the Special Rapporteur in his report, the situation of human rights defenders around the world raises serious concerns. The threats faced by defenders come in

many guises (physical, psychological, economic and social) and may be conditioned by the interaction of multiple factors, including poor governance, absence of the rule of law, an upsurge in religious and political intolerance and fundamentalism, or tensions over development issues. Numerous actors (political, economic, religious, State or non-State) may be involved, by act or omission, in committing violations against defenders. The situation is made more volatile owing to an increase in repressive laws and regulations designed to delegitimize and criminalize human rights activities of defenders, including by restricting their funding or obstructing their activities with burdensome bureaucratic requirements tape. A number of counter-terrorism and security policies introduced by States have posed new challenges to defenders, including new restrictions on their individual freedoms and increasing the risks that they face (ibid., paras. 35-39).

26. The appeals received by the Special Rapporteur point to cases of how the rights and security of defenders have increasingly been disregarded and indeed endangered in numerous ways (see A/HRC/31/55/Add.1). Defenders have been stigmatized, defamed and ostracized. They have been threatened, harassed and subjected to surveillance. They have been assaulted, raped, murdered and made to disappear. They are often subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, accused and sentenced on false charges. They have been subject to laws and regulations that impinge on their rights, in particular their right to freedom of expression, association and movement.

27. Some activists face greater and more specific risks than others (see A/HRC/16/44, A/HRC/19/55 and A/70/217, paras. 61-77). Defenders who challenge social and cultural norms, do not fit stereotypes and prescribed roles, or who challenge power structures in society – such as defenders of sexual orientation and gender identity rights, women defenders, and defenders working on the rights of minorities and indigenous people – are often stigmatized and subjected to threats and attacks from members of society because of who they are or what they do. Defenders in conflict zones and in occupied territories are also more vulnerable to continuous insecurity and threats. Protection practices must therefore be gender-sensitive and suited to the specific needs and situations of such defenders at risk.

28. The Special Rapporteur is furthermore concerned about the rising challenge posed by the closing of civil society space in many parts of the world. In that context, he notes with apprehension the recent trend of restrictive legislation aimed at curtailing civil society activities and their funding in more than 90 States, and the measures taken to restrict significantly the freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association and movement in more than 96 States.[3] The causes for the closing of civil society space are complex and may involve a combination of multifaceted factors, such as a global democratic deficit; an increase in the State's preoccupation with security and the proliferation of counter-terrorism measures; a rise in ideological and religious fundamentalism; or a reaction by the political elite to the power of civil society and its impact on domestic politics.[4]

29. The Human Rights Council has equally expressed its concern at the above-mentioned developments. In its resolution 27/31, urged States to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling environment in which civil society could operate free from hindrance and insecurity. It also mandated OHCHR to prepare a compilation of practical recommendations for the creation and maintenance of such an environment, and to

[3] See CIVICUS, Civil Society Watch Report, June 2015.

[4] CIVICUS and Human Rights Watch, "Closing Civil Society Space" gathering, 14-15 October 2015, summary report.

present it to the Council at its thirty-second session. Some non-governmental organizations have also made their own suggestions on ways to ensure a stronger civil society space.[5]

30. The present report is set against the above background and aims to follow up on the findings made by the Special Rapporteur at seven regional consultations with human rights defenders, as presented to the General Assembly in October 2015 (see para. 24 above). The report therefore explores good practices aimed at protecting human rights defenders and promoting their work, and identifies ways and means to make those practices more effective.

B. Methodology

31. The present report benefited greatly from the frequent exchanges that the Special Rapporteur had with human rights defenders, including during the seven regional consultations, as well as from discussions during experts meetings on the growing threats and risks that defenders face. Furthermore, it drew from the literature and research material on the protection of defenders, and was based on submissions received by the Special Rapporteur from various stakeholders. It was also informed by reports of the previous mandate holder on the security of human rights defenders (see for example A/HRC/13/22), as well as by communications that the mandate has issued on violations committed against defenders in the recent past.[6]

32. In addition, the Special Rapporteur launched a public consultation on good practices in the protection of defenders through an online secure survey, available in English, French and Spanish. He also addressed questionnaires to Member States and national human rights institutions to seek their views. He received 76 submissions in total, including nine from States (Brazil, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Qatar, the Republic of Moldova, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) and an intergovernmental regional organization (European External Action Service). Replies were also received from 43 non-governmental organizations, 19 human rights defenders, three national human rights institutions and a trade union.

C. Defining protection practices

33. In the context of the present report, a good practice in protecting human rights defenders is a practice that contributes to the full respect of their rights and strengthens their security, including by mitigating the risks they face, addressing threats and building support for their work. Although the focus of the report is centred on effective practices in the protection of defenders, the Special Rapporteur does not necessarily aim to compile a compendium of such initiatives; The report rather exemplifies through specific measures ways to strengthen the protection regime of defenders. Nonetheless, as a follow-up to the present report, the Special Rapporteur intends to publish such a compendium in a more accessible format, which will be available online in due course.

34. The Special Rapporteur observes great diversity, creativity and innovation in protection practices around the world. The practices range from emergency responses for defenders in immediate danger to preventative efforts to reduce the risks that they face,

[5] "How to create and maintain the space for civil society: what works?", joint submission by 12 NGOs to the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights, September 2015.

[6] All observation reports on communications by the Special Rapporteur are available from www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/SRHRDefenders/Pages/AnnualReports.aspx.

including by promoting the legitimacy and stressing the importance of their work. Even if one initiative alone is insufficient to protect defenders adequately, each practice can contribute positively to this overall objective.

35. Protection practices are enacted and intertwined at the local, national, regional and international levels–. Practices at one level can have an impact on practices at another. It is important that protection measures at different levels complement and reinforce each other.

36. A wide range of actors engage in protection practices, including State authorities, national human rights institutions, civil society organizations, intergovernmental organizations, donors, the media, business corporations, and defenders themselves. Often, the success of these practices depends on effective collaboration and coordination between different actors.

37. Networks of defenders and their allies facilitate the provision of support, heighten recognition and strengthen solidarity for defenders. The stronger and deeper the relationships among network members, the more swiftly they are able to react and to coordinate their actions to protect defenders. This also conveys a strong message to potential violators, warning them of the consequences of targeting defenders in future.

38. Gender influences the way that defenders experience risks and threats. Discrimination on the basis of gender is linked to other factors, such as ethnicity, religion, class, age, health or sexual orientation.[7] The intersection of these factors produces different vulnerabilities for women. For this reason, it is critical for gender analysis to adopt an intersectionality lens, examining how the combination of such factors has an impact on the rights and security of women defenders.

39. In strengthening the security of defenders, it is crucial that protection practices focus on a "holistic" conception of security. The physical safety of defenders should be interlinked and integrated into their digital security and psychosocial well-being, aspects that tend to be neglected by defenders themselves and their supporters.

40. It is also vital to examine and address what has become an inequitable distribution and availability of protection resources globally. The extent to which defenders are connected, recognized, respected and knowledgeable affects their access to and enjoyment of protection initiatives. Defenders who are more remote and isolated, whose work is delegitimized or stigmatized, or who have less knowledge about strategies, tactics and resources are less likely to benefit from protection initiatives and will be more vulnerable to insecurity as a result.

41. The Special Rapporteur is convinced that effective protection of defenders ultimately starts with their identification, and self-identification, as "human rights defenders". Without being perceived by others or perceiving themselves as such, they may not be aware of their rights as defenders, not seek support from peer or support networks and may not receive protection from the State, civil society and the international community.

42. Raising awareness among defenders is therefore critical to their strengthened protection. In this context, the Special Rapporteur stresses the urgent need to popularize the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and fundamental Freedoms (Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), which regards defenders as persons who, individually or with others, promote or protect human rights at the national and

[7] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 28, para. 18.

international levels (art. 1). Some defenders conduct their rights activities as a full-time profession, while others become defenders by accident or design, through fighting injustice or claiming their rights. In international law, human rights defenders are identified mainly by what they do.

IV. Strengthening the resources and capacities of defenders

43. The first part of a good practice is focused on strengthening the resources and capacities of defenders. Such a practice fosters a culture of "holistic security" among defenders; develops the knowledge, skills and abilities of defenders; builds and supports networks among defenders and their allies; and protects and supports defenders, including in emergencies.

A. Fostering a culture of "holistic security" among defenders

44. Protection practices should focus on strengthening the security of defenders in a holistic manner. Security should not be defined as physical security alone, but should be understood as encompassing multiple dimensions, including economic security, political security, environmental security, digital security and psychosocial well-being.

45. Defenders should be encouraged to integrate security more comprehensively into their work and to address their protection needs more systematically. There are a number of reasons why defenders do not take steps to protect themselves in spite of the risks they face. Some do not expect to be targeted for their work. Some believe that risks are inherent in their work and that there is little they can do to mitigate them effectively. Some tend to focus more on the security of the victims of human rights abuses whom they support rather than their own security.

46. The security of each individual defender often depends on the behaviour of others. This is particularly true when defenders work together in groups, organizations or communities. Defenders should therefore devote time and resources to plan how they will manage their security collectively by, for example, integrating a security perspective into strategic and operational plans, institutionalizing security practices in organizational policies and protocols, or embedding security measures in the implementation of programmes.[8]

47. One aspect of security often neglected by defenders is their own well-being. The stress of human rights work often takes a toll on the mental, emotional and psychological well-being of defenders. Defenders should recognize the signs and symptoms of stress, depression, anxiety, vicarious trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder and burnout, and must be supported in the prevention and treatment of them. It is vitally important for defenders to engage in self-care.

48. As mentioned above, experiences of violence, risk and security are often gender-based. Women human rights defenders report how they suffer more from verbal abuse, sexual violence and rape; how gender stereotypes are used to delegitimize their work; and how other factors, such as ethnicity, age, class and sexual orientation, exacerbate the

[8] Numerous tools have been developed to assist defenders in this regard, such as the *New Protection Manual for Human Rights Defenders* by Protection International and the *Workbook on Security: Practical Steps for Human Rights Defenders at Risk* by Front Line Defenders.

discrimination they face.[9] They emphasize the need for gender-sensitive protection measures that focus on holistic security.

B. Developing the knowledge, skills and abilities of defenders

49. There are three areas that defenders have found valuable in developing their knowledge, skills and abilities: recognizing and defending their rights; adapting tactics and strategies in the face of threats and attacks; and managing their personal and collective security. Such support is being provided in a number of ways; through face-to-face and online training courses, workshops, seminars and conferences; accompaniment, mentoring and collaboration; and the development of databases, manuals, handbooks and tools.

50. In some cases, however, there is insufficient information on and analysis of the risks that defenders face and the way protection operates. Research partnerships between scholars, practitioners and defenders can therefore contribute to identifying and filling critical gaps in knowledge on the security and protection of defenders, and to facilitating critical reflection.[10]

51. Defenders value support in the development of knowledge about their rights and on protecting their rights in the face of evolving risks. This is particularly important for defenders who do not identify themselves as human rights defenders, and do not realize that their work constitutes human rights work and that they have the right to defend rights, as described in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

52. Defenders also wish to receive more support in gaining knowledge on monitoring and documenting violations, gaining access to international and regional human rights mechanisms, engaging with the international community to make their concerns heard, and advocating for and strengthening local and national mechanisms for human rights protection. Defenders unaccustomed to interventions in regional and international forums have found the support and technical advice of international non-governmental organizations familiar with these processes to be helpful.

53. Defenders further wish to share and learn more tactics and strategies for performing human rights work in the face of risks. These may include alternative ways of framing issues so that they are less threating, working with different levels of visibility, and continuing to work under restrictions, such as on funding and registration. Defenders also find it useful to discuss and compare the use of different tools, tactics and strategies for advocacy in specific areas of work.

54. Strong civil society organizations help defenders to mitigate the risks they face and to achieve their collective goals. Some Governments undermine the work of defenders by exploiting weaknesses in governance, administrative structures and regulations. Support for defenders in strategic planning, developing governance mechanisms, risk assessment and threat analysis, fund-raising, human resources and financial management contributes to the sustainability of their work.

55. Security management training helps defenders to assess and manage proactively the risks that they face. It helps them to analyse threats, to address their own vulnerabilities and

[9] See Immaculada Barcia, Our Right to Safety: Women Human Rights Defenders' Holistic Approach to Protection, Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (Toronto, Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2014).

[10] See Special Issue, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, vol. 5, No. 3 (2013), and *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 19, No. 7 (2015).

to strengthen their capacities. It may also be a way to raise awareness of defenders about current and potential threats in their operational context and how they can respond to them.

56. For security management training to be effective, it should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the specific challenges that defenders face. Feedback from defenders suggests that the more tailored the training is to their own contexts and to the specific risks they face, the more they are able to apply what they have learned directly.

57. Building security awareness and habits can be a lengthy process, and requires long-term investment – by the defenders themselves, by trainers and by supporting donors. Effective follow-up and support increases the likelihood that defenders will internalize the practices they have learned.

58. Materials and training should be made easily accessible, including online, as defenders may not always be able to enter face-to-face programmes. Where possible, training should also be provided to persons close to defenders, such as their families, who may be crucial in supporting defenders in times of crisis and whose own security may be affected by the work of defenders.

59. Digital security is increasingly important for defenders, especially for those who rely on information and communications technology for their work. Many defenders do not realize the extent to which they may be exposed to breaches in their privacy and to digital surveillance. Digital security trainers have helped defenders to understand and use a number of tools, tactics and strategies to protect themselves from digital threats, surveillance and online violence.[11] Defenders value opportunities to discuss their specific needs and problems one-on-one with digital security specialists.

C. Building and supporting networks among defenders and their supporters

60. Formal and informal networks that connect defenders and supporters to each other are a key factor in protection, in a number of ways. It is through such networks that information is shared, responses are coordinated, solidarity is expressed, resources are pooled and psychosocial support is given to defenders. Strong relationships allow rapid mobilization in times of crisis. Robust networks can mitigate the risks of surveillance, threats and attacks.

61. National (such as in Colombia, Guatemala, Kenya and Mexico), regional and international networks of defenders and supporters collaborate to document and publicize violations of defenders' rights.[12] They coordinate emergency responses for defenders under attack, arrange meetings with potential allies, and conduct advocacy at multiple levels.

62. Defenders need resources and platforms to develop and sustain these networks, especially in regions where networks are yet to be established. In some cases, more established networks have supported the formation of new networks, including through the sharing of good practices and resources.

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[11] Such as the security in-a-box toolkit, developed by Tactical Technology Collective and Front Line Defenders (https://securityinabox.org).

[12] See for example the work of the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project (www.defenddefenders.org), Forum-Asia (www.forum-asia.org), the Middle East and North Africa Women Human Rights Defender Coalition and the Women Human Rights Defender International Coalition (www.defendingwomen-defendingrights.org).

63. Some defenders work on issues that are political, culturally and socially sensitive – issues that other defenders within the same sociopolitical milieu might not support instinctively. Women defenders and defenders who work on sexual orientation and gender identity rights, for example, often struggle to have their rights recognized in certain contexts. It is important for defenders within the same context to understand and support one another, even if they focus on different rights.

64. In order for networks to remain inclusive, all networks should regularly assess the extent to which they connect to and support the work of marginalized, stigmatized and geographically isolated defenders.

D. Protecting and supporting defenders, including in emergencies

65. A number of protection initiatives have been particularly helpful in protecting defenders in their work, such as protective accompaniment, regular contact and visits with defenders, trial monitoring, urgent appeals, public statements, emergency grants, and relocation initiatives. In order for these interventions to be effective, they need to be timely, accessible and appropriately tailored to the circumstances of defenders. It is vital to consult defenders themselves on the suitability of such interventions for their personal circumstances lest they inadvertently increase the risks that defenders face.

66. Several organizations use protective accompaniment – combining the physical presence of volunteers with advocacy and other activities – to safeguard defenders at risk and to expand their operational space.[13] Accompaniment by local or international actors has helped to deter attacks and to provide psychological support to defenders, given that it demonstrates solidarity between and among defenders locally and transnationally.

67. Visiting and meeting with defenders at risk are an important of way of showing concern for their welfare and support for their work, and are invaluable for counteracting isolation and stigmatization among defenders. Field visits to defenders outside of capital cities, in particular, are a valuable way of engaging with and providing support to a broad range of defenders.

68. Defenders in prisons and under house arrest are often more vulnerable to rights violations, and visiting them can have a protective effect. In particular, the rights and security of defenders in long-term imprisonment should be monitored, and relevant State authorities should be held accountable for their protection.

69. Independent and objective trial monitoring is a way of showing concern for the fairness and effectiveness of judicial systems. By observing court proceedings, gathering information on the trial of defenders and analysing legal practices, trial monitors demonstrate support for defenders and contribute more broadly to the strengthening of judicial systems. The rising number of cases of malicious prosecution of defenders has made legal support critical. New initiatives have created networks of lawyers in Western countries who provide legal aid to threatened defenders.[14]

70. In some countries, civil society organizations have established monitoring programmes that document and verify information on attacks against defenders, identifying patterns of violations and abuses. They maintain databases on defenders, monitoring the

[13] See for example Peace Brigades International (www.peacebrigades.org/about-pbi/what-we-do/protective-accompaniment).

[14] See the programmes run by the American Bar Association (www.americanbar.org/groups/human_rights/justice_defenders.html) and Avocats Sans Frontières (www.asf.be/action/).

risks that they face.[15] They make visible the situation of defenders at risk in particular contexts, pressuring States to be accountable for their protection. Gender analysis should be integrated into human rights monitoring programmes, in particular, from the perspective of intersectionality. This would ensure that the specific experiences of women and transgender persons are, along with those of men, understood and incorporated into the design of protection measures.

71. A number of actors provide emergency grants to defenders in immediate danger. Emergency grants that have easy and fast application processes, quick response times and that allow defenders discretion in using funds most appropriate to their personal situation have helped many defenders cope with threats and attacks.

72. Relocation initiatives have helped defenders to remove themselves from immediate danger and to have some time for rest and respite. In some cases, defenders have found safety in another location within their own country; at other times, they have to seek refuge abroad. Relocation initiatives may take different forms: from emergency shelter in safe houses to temporary hosting arrangements with sympathetic civil society organizations, to shelter city programmes, to the provision of scholarships and fellowships at universities.

73. In emergencies, the search for safe accommodation and workspace is often conducted on an ad hoc basis. Defenders are able to relocate more smoothly and safely when networks and organizations that support them have them readily available. Relocation is often a stressful experience. Structured relocation initiatives that allow defenders to continue their work while away, help them to forge links with host communities, provide support for their families and allow for flexibility in their duration of stay help defenders to manage the uncertainty, isolation and challenges of relocating elsewhere. While such initiatives can be developed anywhere, they usually require the contribution of local organizations with the capacity to raise and manage funds, negotiate hosting requirements and respond appropriately to the specific risks and vulnerabilities of defenders, providing them with the support they need. A number of civil society organizations that manage relocation initiatives have helped defenders to capitalize on their time away by creating opportunities for them to build their networks of contacts, conduct advocacy, support human rights education in host communities and strengthen their knowledge, skills and abilities.

74. It is important that States create and support temporary international relocation initiatives for defenders at risk. A number of States offer protection by issuing special visas or residence permits to defenders on political or humanitarian grounds, and by providing funding and support to local governments and civil society organizations providing shelter and services. For example, in Brazil and Spain, programmes provide support and temporary protection for defenders at risk; in the Netherlands, "shelter cities" are available for defenders; in Germany, the State issues visas on political or humanitarian grounds and provides financial support to defenders; and in Ireland, a humanitarian visa scheme provides support for defenders at risk. Civil society organizations that manage relocation initiatives have found that strong relations with relevant government officials have helped them to overcome challenges when obtaining visas and negotiating immigration status for defenders at risk in a timely way.

[15] For example, see Mesoamerican Women Human Rights Initiative, Violence against women human rights defenders, report 2012-2014, and the reports of the Observatory on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders.

75. For those who are unable to return home, asylum offers more permanent protection for defenders.[16] In some programmes of relocation, this is explicitly recognized by ensuring that defenders most at risk receive asylum from the outset. It is important that asylum processes and decisions be timely and well informed about the situation of defenders, and that international protection complies with international human rights and refugee law, in particular the observation of the principle of non-refoulement.

V. Fostering an enabling environment for defenders

76. The environment in which defenders operate must support the exercise of the human rights that are fundamental to both their activities and their safety. The Special Rapporteur has, in previous reports, outlined some of the elements necessary in this regard, and also some of the global trends that have caused the environment in which many defenders work to deteriorate in recent years (see A/HRC/25/55, paras. 54-126). Building on these elements, the Special Rapporteur will now identify good practices that can support the construction and consolidation of a safe and enabling environment for defenders.

77. In accordance with the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders, the Special Rapporteur believes that the State, as the main duty-bearer, holds the main responsibility for ensuring that defenders can enjoy a safe and enabling environment. Other actors, however, also play an important role in supporting States, independently and in partnership, to achieve this goal. An enabling environment for defenders must be one in which their work is rooted in the broad support of society and in which the institutions and processes of government are aligned with their safety and the aim of their activities. Both are essential for the creation of an environment in which perpetrators of violations of defenders' rights are held to account and are not allowed to enjoy impunity for their actions.[17]

A. Building support for human rights and the work of defenders

1. Human rights awareness

78. As noted above, greater public visibility of threats to defenders can serve a protective function. Indeed, public awareness of human rights and the situation of defenders may even prevent human rights violations against defenders. This awareness and support can be fostered by providing the general public with accurate information on the activities and situation of defenders by means of traditional and social media. Members of the media themselves can be defenders, and can thus face many of the same risks as other defenders (see A/HRC/19/55, paras. 118-122).

79. Defenders can use the media to build support in a number of innovative ways. At the local level, grass-roots media, such as community-based radio stations, have been used, as a platform to discuss their activities and human rights, and thus raise the awareness of the local community. Others have made use of new technology, including social media. Public campaigns on Facebook and Twitter in support of defenders have built the support of new audiences.

80. The media can also, however, reproduce and reinforce patterns of inequality and marginalization; for example, women defenders and LGBTI activists are sometimes targeted in social media smear campaigns and vilified by mainstream media outlets. Some

[16] Martin Jones, "Protecting human rights defenders at risk: asylum and temporary international relocation", *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 19, No. 7 (2015), pp. 935-960.

[17] The Special Rapporteur will examine the issue of impunity in a more focused study at a later stage.

good practices within the media to combat this phenomenon include proactive training about defenders at higher risk and emerging rights, as well as stronger support within media outlets for defenders and those working on these issues. Women defenders have noted a strong correlation between media outlets hiring and supporting women journalists and improved coverage of women's rights.

2. Human rights education

81. Human rights education is a long-standing tactic of the human rights movement and should be directed at various audiences, including State officials, professional groups, students and the general public. Rights education can lead not only to a better understanding of a State's human rights obligations, but can also serve as a vehicle for understanding "the relationships that undergird the discourses and actions of human rights violators, human rights protectors, and human rights victims."[18] It can also provide other concrete dividends; for example, training medical staff in human rights could facilitate the collection and presentation of forensic evidence in the prosecution of perpetrators of violence against defenders.

82. Human rights should be an important component of primary and secondary curricula, and be part of "citizenship" training. Human rights "clubs" have been established in some secondary schools to provide a forum for young people to learn about human rights. Human rights education should also be part of the training of State officials, especially if their work contains human rights dimensions. Post-secondary institutions, including universities, play an important role in human rights education, including in the training of teachers, research and the dissemination of innovative approaches to defending human rights.

83. In all educational sectors, successful human rights education bridges the gap between the knowing and the doing. Innovative pedagogies, such as role-based simulations, mock report writing and field placements, help to fill this gap and to equip future defenders with the knowledge and skills that their future practice will require. Successful education and training are often rooted in cooperation between educational institutions on the one hand and defenders on the other. Bringing defenders "into the classroom" can be a rewarding experience for both.

3. Human rights awards

84. Awards for defenders are an important means of drawing attention to their important work and the risks that they face. There are currently more than 100 human rights awards, more than half of which have been instituted since the turn of the millennium.[19] Prominent awards have also been created explicitly for human rights defenders, such as the Civil Rights Defenders Award, the Human Rights Tulip, the Front Line Defenders Award and the Martin Ennals Award. These awards sometimes come with financial payments that assist award winners to pursue further their human rights activities. The awards also help to build the profile and legitimacy of defenders, give voice to their security concerns and celebrate their successes. Awards often aim at leveraging media attention to improve the situation of defenders.

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[18] Susan Banki, Elisabeth Valiente-Riedl and Paul Duffill, "Teaching Human Rights at the Tertiary Level: Addressing the 'Knowing-Doing Gap' through a Role-Based Simulation Approach", *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, vol. 5, No. 2 (2013), p. 321.

[19] Johannes Thoolen, "Human Rights Awards for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders" *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, vol. 5, No. 3 (2013), pp. 548-555.

4. Local partnerships

85. One approach taken in building local support for defenders is to expand membership of the support community, beyond defenders and other "usual" allies. The leadership of local communities constitutes not only government officials but also informal community leaders, indigenous chiefs, religious figures, businesspersons and other figures of local authority. Working in partnership with local leaders can insulate defenders from threats and attacks and assist in holding the State to account for failures in protection.

86. Defenders often seek support from local religious leaders to gain legitimacy for their activities and to underscore the compatibility of human rights with religious beliefs. The support of religious leaders can often facilitate access for defenders to communities, including marginalized groups within those communities. Religious groups can also shield defenders at risk by providing sanctuary and making otherwise marginalized individuals more visible and accepted by the community.

87. In a similar way, business leaders can also be important partners. The Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (A/HRC/17/31, annex) recognize that business has a crucial role to play in the protection and promotion of human rights. While specific business practices may be challenged by defenders for labour and environmental concerns, the business community should nonetheless support human rights movements. The condemnation of violations by members of the business community not only legitimizes defenders' concerns but also builds opposition to bad business practices. Defenders have learned to successfully resolve local issues by involving more senior business leadership, whether at its national or international headquarters or within its director or shareholder governance mechanisms. In addition, business leaders, with their economic and political influence, can draw in the broader support of society.

5. Human rights cities

88. While the State has primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights, local governments have a complementary role to play. The decentralization of governance and rising urbanization require local governments to assume more responsibility for services vital to human rights protection. As local governments are closer to citizens' everyday needs, they deal with human right issues on a daily basis.[20] As fundamentally local actors, defenders are well-placed to partner with local government to develop a safe and enabling environment.

89. A good practice in this regard is the development of "human rights cities", places where a human rights framework guides the development of community life. The vision of a human rights city has been articulated in a number of joint declarations of local governments, beginning with the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City (2000) and culminating more recently with the Gwangju Human Rights Charter (2012). In this vision, the city and its government are a key conduit for the expression, association and assembly of defenders.[21]

90. Local governments committed to human rights have established such protection mechanisms as ombudsmen, commissions and multi-stakeholder councils to safeguard defenders. They help to monitor and respond to the local situation and to connect local awareness with local social and political action. These mechanisms also encompass tools to survey and report upon the human rights situation within the city; for example, the Gwangju community has developed a human rights indicator that consolidates the

[20] See A/HRC/AC/14/CRP.1, para. 23.

[21] European Charter for Safeguarding Human Rights in the City, art. IX(2).

measurement of more than 100 different commitments, efforts and outcomes within the city. National, regional and international networks of human rights cities serve as a good practice to build the capacity of local government and local defenders in smaller towns.

B. Developing and strengthening legislation, policies and practices for protecting defenders

1. National legislation and policy

91. A number of States have recently introduced legislation that provides a framework for the protection and promotion of the work of human rights defenders. National legislation can lead to a stable and coherent protection framework. Some States (Brazil, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Honduras, Mali, Mexico, the Philippines and Sierra Leone) have recently introduced or are considering legislation or decrees to protect defenders. In some cases, this legislation has come about through collaboration between civil society and the Government. An international network of defenders and civil society organizations are also developing a "model law" for the protection of defenders.[22] Legislation at the central, provincial and city levels may also be useful where these levels of government have responsibility for defenders.

92. Besides national legislation, some States have developed national policies concerning defenders, usually concentrating on the role of their diplomatic representatives abroad in supporting the work of defenders. These policies serve to refocus diplomatic attention on the most vulnerable groups in a society and the defenders who promote their rights. Other States have chosen to integrate their policies on defenders into their more general periodic national plans of action on human rights. While general statements recognizing the importance of defenders are useful, plans of action should contain concrete commitments to achieve specific targets (for example, to train police officers about the rights of defenders). In other States, the challenges of implementing these laws and policies are addressed by strengthening accountability by establishing a regular review process or appointing a minister responsible for human rights or an ombudsman to monitor its implementation and to receive complaints.

2. National protective mechanisms

93. Several States (such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico) have established protective mechanisms to respond to the specific situation of defenders. These mechanisms are often developed at the instigation of and in consultation with defenders, to overcome the challenge of lack of clarity with regard to the government institution responsible for their protection. Such mechanisms offer a centralized institution to monitor and report on the situation of defenders and coordinate the response of the State to threats. In addition, they can make recommendations to reform laws and policies that conflict with the rights of defenders or place them at risk. In some cases, the laws creating the mechanisms also require broader action by other State entities in order to mitigate risks (for example, public statements by senior officials in support of defenders).

3. Other State institutions

94. As independent State entities, national human rights institutions have an important role to play in the protection of defenders (see A/HRC/22/47). They support the creation of

[22] International Service for Human Rights, "Developing a model national law to protect human rights defenders", 20 November 2013.

an enabling environment through human rights awareness, human rights education and human rights monitoring, including of the situation of defenders. They connect advocacy at the national level with regional and international mechanisms, and participate in the work of the Human Rights Council, including the universal periodic review process. National human rights institutions receive and investigate complaints of violations, raise systemic and constitutional concerns with the judiciary and assist in training defenders about their rights and security. They may also observe public demonstrations to safeguard the freedom of assembly by documenting police abuse.

95. The judiciary also can protect defenders at risk, both by ordering preventative steps from government officials and by remedying past violations. Judicial administrators have developed timely methods to bring urgent cases before the court with a view to taking preventative action rather than dealing with damages after the fact. Procedural reforms can escalate the issuance of warrants for the arrest of defenders or the search of human rights organizations to more senior levels of the court, which decreases the likelihood of undue process. Since the judiciary may itself be responsible for violating defenders' rights (for example, by unjustified criminalization of defenders), judges should receive training on international standards, including on the right to defend human rights, in order to minimize their complicity in such violations.

96. National parliamentarians can support the creation and monitoring of laws and policies that support a safe and enabling environment. Caucuses within these bodies focused on human rights issues can organize debates on policy and commission research. For example, the All-Party Parliamentary Human Rights Group, in the United Kingdom, and the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, in the German Parliament, regularly meet with defenders at risk, advocate to other Governments for the protection of defenders, and organize debates and discussions on the situation of defenders and State policies concerning their protection. International networks of parliamentarians provide forums to share good practices and set new standards, such as in the case of the resolution on "Democracy in the digital era and the threat to privacy and individual freedoms" adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) at its 133rd IPU Assembly.

VI. Regional and international support for the protection of defenders

97. The duty to protect human rights defenders lies first and foremost with the State. The international community, however, plays an important role in supporting States in fulfilling their responsibilities.

98. As noted above, defenders are protected at a number of levels. Regional and international forums provide opportunities to discuss, coordinate and develop policies for the protection of defenders. Besides defenders themselves, actors at the international and regional level include international and regional organizations, States, civil society networks, international civil society organizations and philanthropic funders. At these levels, international actors play an important role in supporting the development of strong policies and guidelines, monitoring and responding to the situation of defenders and providing flexible funding for their protection.

A. Developing and disseminating effective policies and guidelines for the protection of defenders

99. Regional and international forums provide opportunities to formulate, coordinate and develop policies for the protection of human rights defenders. Regional organizations

have played a leading role in developing and coordinating protection practices. For example, OSCE has developed Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders to support partnerships between Governments and defenders aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the latter. Moving beyond the domestic implementation of protection practices, the European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders set out regional policy objectives and practical initiatives for the European Union and its member States in support of defenders worldwide. The Guidelines are complemented by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, which provides financial assistance to organizations supporting the work of defenders. The Guidelines have provided a foundation for the development of national policies and plans of action in, for example, Finland, Ireland and the Netherlands. Other States, such as Norway and Switzerland, have also adopted national guidelines for supporting defenders. It is vital that such guidelines be disseminated widely so that defenders may be aware of how to engage with relevant actors concerning their protection, and that States allocate resources for the implementation of the guidelines.

100. The Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has collaborated with civil society networks to develop recommendations that address the underlying conditions for a safe and enabling environment. Such forms of collaboration both allow for the mobilization of resources for research and ensure that the analysis reflects the situation on the ground.

101. Defenders have themselves organized regional and international networks to support and coordinate their activities. International civil society organizations with particular expertise in the protection of defenders have provided valuable support to these networks and the development of good practices and guidelines.

B. Supporting the monitoring of and responses to the situation of defenders

102. Regional and international forums are also an important mechanism for monitoring the situation of defenders and responses to situations of risk. The Office of the Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights monitors the situation of defenders and issues "precautionary measures", requesting States to take action when defenders are at acute risk. Such urgent action procedures in regional organizations allow for a rapid and context-sensitive response to situations of risk. The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe has raised cases of defenders at risk through his dialogue with authorities and intervened before the European Court of Human Rights in defenders-related cases.[23]

103. United Nations human rights mechanisms have supported the protection of defenders in a number of ways. The Special Rapporteur receives and acts on a large number of communications from defenders at risk. When possible, these communications prompt a discussion with State authorities, which results in their more effective protection. The treaty bodies, mandated to monitor the implementation of State parties' obligations under the treaties, can consider individual communications and conduct inquiries and investigations through country visits. The universal periodic review has also provided a forum for considering the situation of defenders. Resolutions adopted by the Human Rights Council on the protection of defenders have provided normative language, reflecting the needs and circumstances of defenders around the world.

[23] See www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/human-rights-defenders.

104. Participation in international mechanisms can, however, place defenders at increased risk of reprisal (see A/HRC/30/29). The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 22/6, reaffirmed the right of everyone to unhindered access to and communication with international bodies. The President of the Council, its special procedures and the treaty bodies have paid more focused attention in considering complaints received from defenders who have been subjected to reprisal for their cooperation with those entities. During regional consultations held with the Special Rapporteur, defenders underscored the need to reach out to new communities of defenders about the protection role of the United Nations and regional mechanisms.

105. States have also supported defenders in practical ways. Besides visits and meetings with defenders, officials can also raise cases of defenders during high-level visits and in dialogues with political leaders. In some cases, diplomatic missions have formally advocated the cases of defenders with Governments in host countries through démarches sometimes undertaken jointly with other States. Public statements and private meetings are also ways of signalling support for defenders. High-level interventions on behalf of defenders have been effective in pressuring Governments to take appropriate action for defenders. Diplomatic missions should, however, have direct contact with defenders and consult them (and, if necessary, their relatives or designated contact persons) on the appropriateness of actions.

C. Providing resources for the protection of defenders

106. Certain international actors directly support defenders at risk by providing funding for protection programmes. Such funding supports both preventative action and responses to immediate threats. This assistance is consistent with the right to solicit, receive and utilize resources articulated in the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. Unfortunately, the ability of defenders at risk to benefit from such international support is often limited by restrictive State policies, which further exacerbate their vulnerability, and the restrictive policies of funders.

107. The vast majority of defenders have expressed the need for long-term, flexible funding arrangements that can sustain their programmatic work and accommodate local contexts, and dynamic changes in their environment. They have also expressed the hope that donors will pay particular attention to preparedness and prevention and strengthen their efforts to provide rest, respite and rehabilitation opportunities for defenders.[24]

108. Flexibility in the organizational structure to receive funding is also important, in that it allows defenders choose to organize their associations in a number of different ways, taking into account restrictive State policies. In ensuring accountability for the use of funding, reporting should be streamlined and based on evolving good practices. International actors should be sensitive to the local situation of defenders and respect the local knowledge of defenders to ensure that the provision of resources or conditions linked to the receipt of funding do not increase further the risks that defenders face.

109. The delayed disbursement of funds by donors can have a negative impact on defenders' operations, especially on their capacity to pay their staff on time. Many civil society organizations have limited, if any, cash reserves and credit lines with banks.

[24] See Borislav Petranov and Monette Zard, *Keeping Defenders Safe: A Call for Donor Action* (New York, International Human Rights Funders Group, 2014).

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

110. **The protection of human rights defenders should be seen in the context of three obligations that international human rights law imposes on States: to respect human rights by refraining from violating them; to protect such rights by intervening through protective action on behalf of defenders against threats by others; and to fulfil them by ensuring a safe and enabling environment for defenders to enjoy their rights and to carry out their activities.**

111. **The Special Rapporteur proposes seven principles that, in his view, should underpin good practices by States in the protection of human rights defenders:**

- **Principle 1: They should adopt a rights-based approach to protection, empowering defenders to know and claim their rights and increasing the ability and accountability of those responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights.**
- **Principle 2: They should recognize that defenders are diverse; they come from different backgrounds, cultures and belief systems. From the outset, they may not self-identify or be identified by others as defenders.**
- **Principle 3: They should recognize the significance of gender in the protection of defenders and apply an intersectionality approach to the assessment of risks and to the design of protection initiatives. They should also recognize that some defenders are at greater risk than others because of who they are and what they do.**
- **Principle 4: They should focus on the "holistic security" of defenders, in particular their physical safety, digital security and psychosocial well-being.**
- **Principle 5: They should acknowledge that defenders are interconnected. They should not focus on the rights and security of individual defenders alone, but also include the groups, organizations, communities and family members who share their risks.**
- **Principle 6: They should involve defenders in the development, choice, implementation and evaluation of strategies and tactics for their protection. The participation of defenders is a key factor in their security.**
- **Principle 7: They should be flexible, adaptable and tailored to the specific needs and circumstances of defenders.**

B. Recommendations

112. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that all stakeholders engaged in the protection of human rights defenders:**

(a) **Apply the seven above-mentioned principles in the design and implementation of their protection practices;**

(b) **Continuously develop good practices, critically reflecting on any gaps, gender-specific inequalities or cases of inequitable distribution of protection resources that may arise;**

(c) **Explore ways to replicate and disseminate good protection practices, including by transferring them to different and new contexts.**

113. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that States:**

(a) **Enact legislative and policy frameworks with a view to establishing national protection programmes for defenders, in consultation with defenders and civil society. In States with a federal structure, federal legislation should be the basis for the programme, and federal authorities should have oversight over the programmes that are administered by local governments;**

(b) **Dedicate sufficient funding, and refrain from interfering with externally-sourced funding, for the protection of defenders;**

(c) **Develop a mechanism to investigate complaints of threats or violations against defenders in a prompt and effective manner, and initiate appropriate disciplinary, civil and criminal proceedings against perpetrators as part of systemic measures to prevent impunity for such acts;**

(d) **Disseminate the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders through policy measures and awareness-raising campaigns;**

(e) **Provide training to relevant government officials, including police, military and other security officers, as well as members of the judiciary, on the legitimate role of defenders and their rights, in accordance with international human rights law.**

114. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that regional intergovernmental organizations:**

(a) **Develop and disseminate strong policies and guidelines for the protection of human rights defenders, in consultation with defenders and civil society;**

(b) **Where policies and guidelines are in place, develop concrete plans of action at all levels, with specific monitoring mechanisms to review their effectiveness on the ground, including by seeking feedback from defenders;**

(c) **Develop interregional coordination mechanisms to share experiences with a view to strengthening protection practices.**

115. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that civil society and human rights defenders:**

(a) **Develop strategies to raise general awareness about the right to defend rights and to be protected for exercising that right, including through promoting the self-identification of human rights defenders, building social support for human rights and the work of defenders, and disseminating the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders;**

(b) **Foster a culture of "holistic security", focusing in particular on the physical, digital and psychosocial dimensions of security, and facilitate the internalization of security awareness individually and collectively;**

(c) **Build and support networks among defenders and their allies at all levels, critically reviewing their impact on the protection of defenders and ensuring diversity and inclusiveness in the scope of work and membership;**

(d) **Develop concrete ways to strengthen the knowledge, skills and abilities of defenders, in particular on how to protect their rights and to manage their security;**

(e) Continuously adapt existing measures to protect defenders at risk, paying particular attention to the specific needs of those who are most at risk.

116. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that financial donors:**

(a) Increase financial resources for protection initiatives focusing on the "holistic security" of defenders;

(b) Ensure that funding for civil society and defenders is sensitive to their protection needs, including by ensuring that funding promotes long-term sustainability and is sufficiently flexible for operational needs, can be adapted in response to changes in the environment, is disbursed in a timely manner and not burdensome to administer.

117. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that national human rights institutions:**

(a) Develop plans of action to protect defenders, establish focal points to coordinate their implementation and interact with defenders on a regular basis;

(b) Monitor and investigate complaints received from defenders on the violations of their rights.

118. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that the United Nations:**

(a) Formulate and implement strategies and plans of actions\ to strengthen the protection of defenders and to prevent violations against them, including in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals and in the context of the Human Rights Up Front initiative;

(b) Develop strategies of risk assessment and management in activities involving civil society and defenders, including by monitoring and responding to cases of reprisal for cooperation with the United Nations at all levels, in particular its human rights mechanisms.